

A HERO.

He trends no gory battlefields,
Wellington, or Bonaparte;
He leads no Knights of Crimson Cross,
Like Richard of the Lion-heart.
I've read of no exploit of his,
Nor do I even know his name,
For round his brow has never been twined
The laurel wreath of fame.

In fact, he's just a simple boy,
A merry, gentlemanly lad,
Whose honest heart and kindly words
Must make the very angels glad.
The fearless glances of his eyes
Candor and truthfulness reveal,
And prove to all that he has naught
Of meanness to conceal.

At lessons, household tasks or play,
His earnest spirit is the same;
In school, he stands the first in class,
Is foremost in each manly game.
Kind words and sunny smiles he gives
To all, nor ceases there. Indeed,
He's ready with a willing hand
To help another's need.

My eyes are aching for a sight
Of him—my ideal boy-hero.
I challenge you to tell me now
If such a lad you really know.
I'd like to grasp him by the hand,
And tell him that around his name
There is a glory brighter than
The blaze of worldly fame.

—Golden Days.



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CHAPTER IX.—CONTINUED.

I found Charles mounted on Savoy, his one-eyed black charger, one of the finest horses I have ever seen. The king grasped the situation at a glance. He gave a sharp order, closed his visor with a snap, and in five minutes a thousand lances followed him down the long slope, on which the Spaniards were advancing. It was an absolutely silent charge. Not a cheer went up, and the only sound was the thunder of the horses' hoofs, and the clink of mail as we sped on after the king. Then there was a sudden crash, and a sea of struggling men and horses. The veteran troops of the great captain maintained their high reputation, fighting like dragons to the end.

Charles, whose horse had carried him far in advance of us all, was in great danger. His helmet had fallen off, and he was exposed. He was recognized. Gonzaga, seeing all was lost, made a despairing rush at the king with a half-dozen men at his back, and had it not been for the way Savoy kicked and plunged, would have surely slain him. Urging my horse to its utmost speed, I reached Charles just in time to ward off a furious blow aimed by the Spaniard at the king, and riding full tilt against him, brought down both horse and man. The next moment others came up, and we were safe. Philip de Comines reproached the king respectfully for running himself into peril; but Charles, wiping his sword on the mane of his charger, said, with a laugh:

"All is well that ends well, my lord of Argenton; but it is thanks to this good sword here, and he turned to me, 'that our cousin of Orleans must exercise his patience yet a little longer. Come closer, sir.'"

I dismounted and approached, helmet in hand. The king detached the cross of St. Lazarus he wore, and, bending from the saddle, slipped the loop of the ribbon round my neck.

"Wear this for the sake of France," he said, with a gracious smile.

And now the patience of Orleans had come to its end, and Louis XII. was king, and of my hopes and dreams, all that remained was the cross of the order blinking at me.

It had to go and there was no help for it. With an effort I rose, and, thrusting the cross into my pocket, hurried into the street. My way led to the ward of San Spirito, and it took me some little time to reach the place where I meant to dispose of the jewel. When I reached it, I was so overcome with weakness that I had to halt for a moment to rest. It was during that halt, that hesitation of a minute, that my courage came back to me, and I pulled forth the cross and held it in my cold fingers with a heart tossed by conflicting emotions. I could not do it. Death would be preferable. Well, I had faced death before, and there was no reason why I should not do so again with an equal mind. The Arno was deep enough to hold me, and God would perhaps be kinder in the next world than in this. I placed the cross back slowly, my honor was still white, and death that was coming would give me a full quittance for all my troubles. I turned my back on the pawnbroker and went towards the Arno; but I had miscalculated my strength, and near San Felice I felt a sudden giddiness and sank down on the pavement. I struggled to rise, but the faintness increased, and, dragging myself tie closely to the wall, I leaned against it in a sitting posture, and a kind of stupor fell upon me, through which I still felt the intolerable pangs of hunger. In a little time I felt better, and as I saw the flash of torches, and heard voices in laughing conversation, I made an effort to rise, gaining my feet just as two ladies, with their attendants, came opposite to me, and then I staggered back again.

"Poor man! Lie here!"

"I am starving," I said in the bitterness of my agony, and the next moment could have killed myself, for I recognized the ladies whom I had rescued from Luigi in the Garden of St. Michael. I had my desire and had seen her again; but how?

Madonna Angiola made a hurried search for her purse, and, not finding it, with a hasty movement tore something off a bracelet, and thrust it into my hand. Before I could recover from my astonishment they had gone on, and although I called after them they did not stop. The shame of having received charity, and from her, was all but unbearable; but with it I felt the hand of heaven knocking at me in a manner that would take no denial. My courage was gone, and urged by the fierce pangs of my hunger, I resolved to utilize the gift, and obtain some food to give me strength to live. I smile as I think of this now. Then it was no laughing matter. I plucked myself up sufficiently to go back to the pawnshop. Entering it, I placed the article, which I judged to be a jewel, but which I had not even examined, before the man in attendance, and asked him for an advance thereon.

"It is one of the gold tarsi of Amalfi," he said, pointing it on his finger, "and of full weight. Do you wish to sell it?"

"No," I replied, "I merely wish to pledge it."

"I will give you two crowns," he pushed the money to me, and with it a receipt. I gathered these up, and staggered rather than walked to the Marocco inn, which lay hard by. There were half-a-dozen people

supping there; but I had no eyes for them, all I could think of was the pangs of the roll of white bread, and the ruby Chianti, which I ordered. It is a common belief that those who have not eaten food for any length of time are unable to do so when it is placed before them at first. Whether I am constitutionally stronger than the generality of men, I do not know; all I can say is, that I formed an exception to the rule, if a true one, and demolished my supper, gaining strength with every mouthful, and feeling my chilled blood warmer with every drop I drank of my goblet of wine. My courage came back to me and I banished all thoughts of the Arno. At last I was done, and leaning back in my seat viewed with complacency the huge orifice I had made in a most excellent pasty, and the whites slowly slipped my wine. That feeling of sleepy comfort, which attends like a good angel on a full meal, possessed me, my sorrows had for the moment taken themselves off, and I grieve to say I did not even bestow a thought on her to whose charity I was indebted practically for my life. I sat for the moment, lapped in a dreamy comfort, forgetful of all things. I dozed for about half an hour, and opened my eyes with my head clear again, and my pulse beating firmly. I had, somewhat recklessly, it is true, enjoyed a crown's worth of happiness, there was another fat crown still in my pouch; with care it would last some days, and during that time luck might turn. With these thoughts running in my head, I let my eyes wander over the room. It was now somewhat late, and only the night-lights were left. Of those a party of five was seated at a table a little removed from me, and were conversing in low tones. It needed but a glance to see that they were not honest men, and from the suspicious manner in which they looked around them, I gathered they were here for no good purpose. One of the party rested his eyes on me, and then whispered to a companion, who was seated with his face from me. I caught the answer, which was given in somewhat loud tones. "Even if he does, what does it matter? Cannot a few gentlemen enjoy a glass in peace at their ordinary? If he gives trouble we can quiet him."

Could it be? Yes, it was no other than the ancient Brico, who had, I perceived, got out of the clutches of his friends, the catch-polls of Monteverchi. I made certain, therefore, I would have business shortly, and, leaning back again, pretended to doze, keeping my ears very wide open, and holding a watch on the scoundrels from the tail of my eye.

"He carries late," said one, "perhaps your information is wrong."

"I have it from a sure hand, from the younger Ceci. Buonocorsi and he will both be here. The former, however, as you know, we do not want."

I almost started at these words. Was it possible that I had stumbled on the bravos who were engaged in Ceci's plot? If so, stranger things never happened to me, and chance was probably throwing in my way what otherwise I would never have been able to discover. Even as the last speaker finished his sentence, two persons, evidently of consequence, and a woman entered the inn, and set themselves down at a table close to mine. The men both wore masks, but the lady did not, and let her glance run with a free look on us all. One of her two companions, a very stout man, put down his mask, disclosing a jolly, ruddy face, and roared out for a glass of wine. The other still keeping his features covered, engaged in a lively badinage with his fair friend, and as he moved his hand slightly I caught the flash of a valuable ring.

The five at the table all had their heads together now, and I saw the one nearest to me stealthily draw his sword. With an apparently careless movement I so placed my own weapon as to be at hand on the moment. Presently Brico arose, and, swaggering across the room with a glass in his hand, deliberately stopped before the lady, and drained it to her health. She laughed back her appreciation, and Brico called out:

"Blood of a king! Madonna, but you waste yourself with this corpulence there, and he jerked his hand towards the stout man, who sat speechless, his cheeks purple with rage. "Come and join us good fellows here," he added, and attempted to pass his arm around her waist; but the masked stranger flashed out his rapier, and Brico only escaped being skewered by an agile retreat.

This was, however, the signal for an instant assault, and with a shout of "A Medici-palle-palle," those at the table rushed on the smaller party. As they rose, I jumped up, and pushed my table with great violence in their direction. Two of the men fell over it, and this gave me time to draw my sword and join the weaker party. The lady rushed out with a scream, and the stout gentleman, following lustily for help, followed suit, the attack being solely directed against the masked man, who, with his back to the wall, and the table between himself and his assailants, defended himself with great spirit and skill.

Slashing one of the ruffians across the face, which put him out of the fight, I ranged alongside of the stranger, and a very pretty set to ensued. At this juncture the innkeeper entered with half-a-dozen others, and kept dancing about, adjuring us to stop, but offering no help. I made for Brico, but could not reach him, having to engage with a better swordsman than I had met for many a day; but I saw we were now three to two, for the ancient was more bent on executing flourishes with his sword, and in cheering on the attack, than on real business. My opponent was a left-handed man, so anything like a time-thrust was out of the question. He played the usual game of left-handed men, namely, a cut over, and disengagement in tierce, but, reminding I forced him to a straight riposte, and pinned him through the ribs. He fell with a howl, just as my companion ran his men through. We were now two to two, if Brico was included, but the others waited for no more and fled, no attempt being made to stay them by the host. The innkeeper, however, began to make a great to-do; but the stranger thrust a purse in his hand, and, lifting his mask, spoke a few words in mine host's ear. The effect was magical, and the padrone was now all civility. We had a look at the two men who were doing the one who was flushed across the face being nowhere to be seen. They were both quite dead, and an ill-looking pair of corpses did they make.

"Have these carrion removed, padrone—and beware how you say a word of what has happened, signore," and the masked man held his hand out to me: "I thank you heartily and you will find I have a long memory. Do me the favor to accompany me to my house."

I had no reason to refuse, and, bowing my acknowledgments, we left the inn.

CHAPTER X.

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI.

As we reached the street I expressed the hope that the lady and her stout companion were in safety. The stranger laughed: "Oh, Buonocorsi, he and La Sirani are no doubt shivering in security by this time; but let us hasten, for although we have barely no more than a couple of cross-bow shots to go, our bravos may return and have better luck. St. John! but it was a narrow affair."

Our way led back to San Felice, past the

Ponte Vecchio, and at length we came to a half before a small side door, let into what seemed to me nothing but a vast blank wall.

My new friend opened this door noiselessly, with a key he drew from his pocket, and invited me to enter. Pleading ignorance of the way, however, I gave him the pass, and followed him up a narrow and very dark stairway, which opened into a long gallery, likewise in semi-darkness. Up this gallery we went, then there was another small passage, and, lifting a curtain at the end of this, we stepped past an open door into a large room, evidently a study, for it was filled with books, all but the side near the passage, which was covered by a heavy tapestry. In the middle of the room was a large table littered with papers in much confusion, and eight tall candles burning in a pair of grotesque candelabra threw a bright but soft light over the chamber.

"Sit you down there," said my host, pointing to a chair, "and we will have something to drink. Diavolo! You are wounded! Why did you not say so?"

I looked at my left arm, and, sure enough, the coat sleeve was red with an enlarging patch. It was only a trifle, however, as we found on examination; but my companion, who still kept his mask on, insisted on bandaging it, which he did with deft fingers, and then turning to a curiously inlaid cabinet, let into the wall, brought thenceforth a flagon of green crystal and two long-stemmed Venetian glasses.

Whilst he was thus engaged my eyes rested on a book on the table, and I saw at a glance that it was the copy of "Pitarch's Lives" which Ceci had lent me on payment, so that it was most probable that I was in the presence of the noble against whom the Medici plot was directed, and in whose library the attendant's service was employed, partly I guessed as a spy. My hand was on the book as my host placed the glasses on the table, and observing the movement he said, with a smile:

"I see, signore, you not only carry a sharp sword, but know a book as well."

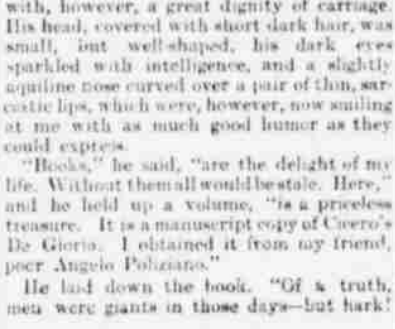
"As for books, signore," I answered, "I know but little of them. This one, however, I thought I had seen before."

"Indeed," he said, "that is odd, for I believe this is the only rendering of Pitarch into Italian which is in existence. Strange, too, as for over a week I could not find it anywhere."

"Very," I answered, shortly, and my host, pouring out a glass for me, helped himself, and, settling comfortably in a chair opposite to me, slowly removed his mask and laid it aside. I saw before me a man in the prime of life, of middle height and slender figure, with, however, a great dignity of carriage. His head, covered with short dark hair, was small, but well-shaped, his dark eyes sparkled with intelligence, and a slightly upturned nose curved over a pair of thin, sarcastic lips, which were, however, now smiling at me with as much good humor as they could express.

"Books," he said, "are the delight of my life. Without them I would be lost. Here," and he held up a volume, "is a priceless treasure. It is a manuscript copy of Cicero's De Gloria. I obtained it from my friend, poor Angelo Poliziano."

He laid down the book. "Of a truth, men were giants in those days—but hark!"



She tore something off a bracelet and placed it in my hand.

That is too loud for a rat." At this moment we heard a distinct rustling behind the tapestry, which hung on one side of the wall. My host sprang up, and, with drawn rapier in his hand, lifted the arras. I followed him; but we observed nothing but a door, which was concealed behind the curtain. "This is a private door leading to the corridor, and, confound it—it is open. How the devil did this happen? However, this will make things sure." He turned the key which was in the lock, and, removing it, placed it carefully aside in a drawer, and his face was shaded a little with anxiety. This, however, he brushed off like a fly, and, resuming our seats, he poured out some more wine for both of us, and said:

"Signore, now that I observe you closely, it appears to me that your sword, good as it is, has not helped you to fill your purse."

"I was able to save your life, Messer—I know not your name," I answered, with a little heat, and rose as if to take my leave.

He laughed cheerfully, and, putting his hand on my shoulder, pressed me back into my chair.

"Sit down, signore, I meant no offense, and my name is Niccolo Machiavelli. Will you give me yours in return?"

I was, then, before the secretary of the Council of Ten, the crafty politician who at that time held Florence in his hand, and with whose name all Italy was full. I now understood Ceci's plot at once, but the question was, should I give my right name? Sooner or later the secretary would find out, and I accordingly answered him as honestly as possible.

"I pass under the name of Donati, your excellency; will that do?"

He leaned back reflectively. "I like confidence when I give it," he said, "and yet perhaps it does not matter. You had no idea who I was when you helped me?" he added, with a quick look.

"No, the slightest," I did not feel justified in adding more.

"Well, signore, Donati, I have work for which I want a brave man, and if you care to accept it I offer it to you."

"Your excellency, I will plainly say that I hardly know where to turn for employment; in fact, I am in such straits that I cannot afford to look for a hair in any egg that may fall my way; at the same time your business must be such as I can take with honor."

"With honor, of course," he smiled sarcastically, and then added: "I suppose I can trust you?"

"You need not give me employment, signore, if you do not think you can trust me; and pardon me—it is getting late."

"Sit down, man. I did it but to try you, and you are the man I want. Where do you lodge?"

"In the Albizani palace, in the street di Pucci."

"Could you leave Florence at a moment's notice?"

"It is a matter of funds."

"Then, yes."

"Enough! Tomorrow a man will call on you, precisely at noon, with a letter, with a letter that letter delivered into the hands of the cardinal of Rome at Rome. It is a secret matter, and if you fail in it you may forfeit your life. If you succeed, his eminence will give you further occupation. Do you accept?"

"Yes."

As I said this we again heard the creaking noise, and Machiavelli jumped up as agile as a panther, and springing to the door behind the arras. It was open; but no one was there.

"Maldetto!" he exclaimed. "Signore, there are spies in my own house—help me to tear down this tapestry."

I did so, and in a few minutes we laid bare the side of the room, and piled the tapestry in a heap against a bookshelf.

"That is better," Machiavelli said, "you see—the spy, whoever he is, must have a master key. There is no use going into the passage after him; but for the present I fancy we are safe. I must have a bolt put on and keep a watch. To resume business, however. You say you accept, and only need funds."

"Exactly so."

He pulled from a drawer a bag, which chinked with a pleasant sound to my ears. "Here," he said, "are a hundred crowns. It is your fee for the task I set you."

"It is ample."

"And now, Messer—Donati—farewell! You will always find a friend in me. You know your way—I have left the side door open—and bear a loose sword."

"A word, your excellency."

"Say on."

"From what has happened to-night, I see plainly that the plotters against your life have friends very near you. If they failed this time they may not fail again. One of the men who made the attack to-night I recognized. He is called Brico, formerly an ancient, perhaps still so, in the army of Tremouille."

"I will attend to the Signor Brico."

"Yet a little more. If your excellency's movements are known it is probably from within your own house. I would keep an eye on your library scribe."

"Per Bacco! Signor Donati, but you know too much. I am more and more your debtor."

"The hundred crowns have repaid me," I replied, as I took my departure, having said all I dared say of the plot without breaking my pledge of secrecy to Ceci.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

The Pleasure of His Company.

A San Francisco hostess, famous for her tact and resourcefulness, tells a good story on herself. It seems that an officer in one of the Tennessee companies, a very shy young man, brought letters with him when his regiment came to the coast, and presented himself one evening at the (let us say) Van Ness avenue residence. As he was the son of a well-known public man and a member of an old family, his hostess exerted herself to entertain him. "We should be glad to have the pleasure of your company Friday at dinner," she said as he was leaving; "the Hawaiian commissioners are to be with us." Friday came and the commission. Shortly before the hour for dinner the butler excitedly entered the room. "They're a regiment of soldiers, mum, outside."

"No doubt in honor of the commissioners; I will tell them." Just then the lieutenant was announced. "When you are ready," he said, "I will have the men march to their places in formation."

"Why," said the lady, "what men?" "It's my company," was the reply, "all but ten, and they're very sorry, but they couldn't come."—San Francisco Argonaut.

Her Mistake.

Lady (to tramp)—Now, you've had your dinner, why don't you go right out and saw that wood? What are you waiting round here for?

Tram—Don't be in a hurry, lady. Do you take me for a slot machine?

Lady—I expect you to act like one.

Tram—I'm like one of the slot machines that don't work.

And is he walked leisurely out of the yard picking his teeth as he was sorry she hadn't let him alone.—Harlem Life.

Prima Facie.

Clerk—In my opinion, this Dr. Blew in, who has come to town lately, is a fraud.

Druggist—What's the matter with him?

Clerk—He's no doctor. He's some bookkeeper out of a job. Look at that prescription. You can read it.—Chicago Tribune.

He Kept His Job.

Boss—See here, William, this is the twentieth time you've been late, and unless you've got a good excuse you're going to be fired.

William (the porter)—I stopped into church on my way downtown and prayed for the improvement of your business.—N. Y. World.

Rather Warm.

"Speaking of battles, major," said the bud of a former season, "were you ever in what might be termed a real, serious engagement?"

"Well, rather," replied the major, "I was once engaged to a widow for three weeks."—Chicago Daily News.

Coming and Going.

Mrs. Crimmonbeak—There's been a steady stream of men going into that saloon nearly all day long.

Mr. Crimmonbeak—I don't suppose it was a very steady string coming out.—Yonkers Statesman.

A Mean Thing.

"Do you call this angel-cake, Katharine?"

"Yes; isn't it good?"

"Of course, dear; but I didn't know there were any iron-jawed angels."—Detroit Free Press.

An Infallible Method.

Professor (lecturing on precious metals)—What is the easiest way of determining whether an object consists of gold or silver?

Student—Try to pawn it!—Fiegeend Blaster.

Feasting of the Horse.

So soon as nature sees an improvement, there is a change. The cattle give way to electricity. The spinning wheel to machinery, the horse to the automobile. The fact that Hostetter's Stomach Bitters has been sold for over half a century, proves its value. There is nothing to equal it for stomach and liver trouble. It is Nature's own remedy, and the only one to cure dyspepsia or weak stomach.

Feminine Credulity.

A woman believes a man when he says she is sensible, even though she has but a moment since believed him when he said she was pretty.—Detroit Journal.

"You shall pay dearly for this!" he vowed, and the person addressed did, for it was the coal man, who had just deposited a ton in the cellar, who made the remark.—Philadelphia North American.

"I've got no case," said a lawyer who was trying a suit for damages against a railroad, "but I've got the jury."—Atchison Globe.

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